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ABSTRACT

The only way that a program of school desegregation can be successfully implemented is with strong community participation. Boards of Education must develop policies to provide quality education in a culturally pluralistic society. Through community education, the school sytem can look at the total community in terms of its needs, wants, problems, and priorities. The school-community relationship can then be developed in such a way that decision making and power become a shared responsibility, with community people determining their own needs, priorities, and courses of action, rather than having their options dictated by institutions. Staff and parent involvement are also necessary in desegregation programs, and efforts to strengthen these individuals' knowledge and intercommunication should be undertaken. (Hl)

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COMMUNITY EDUCATION
AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION:
A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Position Paper
developed
by
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If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace....Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented while penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases....

A Speech by Chief Joseph
of the Nez Perce Indians,
in Washington, 1870

Desegregation Programs

Desegregation continues as one of the most controversial topics in American education. A number of school districts have faced new court orders and the associated and sometimes volatile problems accompanying implementation.

The desegregated school is a starting point in any meaningful attempt to provide relevant, quality education to our nation's children. Resources should be provided and directed toward meeting students' educational needs in a culturally pluralistic society, as well as a culturally pluralistic classroom.

Desegregation of schools, however, is not enough. Dr. Leonard Beckum, Director of Project STRIDE, San Francisco states,

> "Racial and ethnic groups, both students and teachers, too often remain segregated within the desegregated school. Teachers and administrators find themselves faced with unexpected and unfamiliar problems in the educational process. A whole new set of demands is made of counselors; curriculum materials come under close scrutiny and frequent criticism from parents and community; and discipline or classroom management problems begin to hinder the teacher's facilitation of learning. When we realize the complexity of the total desegregation effort in any school, it appeared to us that a deeper understanding of the educational needs of minority students was critical to and also consonant with the basic intent of desegregation/integration processes." 1

In accordance with Dr. Beckum's comments, it should be the intent of Boards of Education to initiate immediate sequential steps necessary to establish and implement the components of and integration plan. The general policy statement of most

Boards of Education recognizes that every person has the right to be treated equal and to be afforded equal opportunity to pursue personal and social fulfillment of potential. It is further stated that said policy provide a quality education that will offer students the opportunity to:

1. Master basic skills and fundamental knowledge.
2. Develop a positive self-image and appreciation of individual and cultural differences and similarities.
3. Grow in personal integrity and gain a sense of responsibility.
4. Realize the development of their talents and aspirations for personal fulfillment and to become contributing members of society.
5. Maintain and improve equality of educational opportunity for each student by providing integrated education in its programs and services.
6. Produce progress in the reduction of racial isolation in schools and the harmful effects of such isolation by involving the students, staff, parents, and community.

Community Education

"What is needed is greater diversity in formal education which reflects the actual diversity of the learning situations and the variety of experience that living in today's world demands." [2]

Community Education is a means of looking at a total community, finding its needs, wants and problems, determining priorities, and finding the human and financial resources to respond to these community concerns. Decision-making and power become a shared responsibility, with community people determining their own course of action rather than others attempting to tell them what is best for their lives.

If communities are capable of positive change, and social problems are natural and expected, but they have resolutions, how does the process of Community Education interface with the hysteria surrounding the desegregation of schools?

School-Community Relations

The School-Community relations should be developed in ways which reinforce each component and build toward an effective working relationship among the total school-community (i.e. staff, students, parents, and community): Human Relations, Staff Development, Parent Involvement, and Communications.

The development of a desegregation/integration rationale must clearly relate to recommendations of the total community, existing advisory commission/council, and to the mandate of the court. Each component (Human Relations, Staff Development, Parent Involvement, and Communications) must include a specific desegregation/integration rationale for maximum effectiveness.

Human Relations

- Clear, systematic organization with Community Education/Relations Department providing leadership for human relations program.
- Programs extend to all persons who directly affect students in the classroom, and who in anyway have an impact upon the emotional and psychological well-being of students.
- Students, parents, and community be involved in co-operative effort to integrate, not simply desegregate, quality educational experiences.

Staff Development

- The district upgrade and expand necessary classes, workshops and seminars in (1) communication skills, (2) awareness of self and others, (3) interpersonal relations, (4) cultural and socioeconomic diversity, (5) use of community, and (6) instructional techniques for integrated classrooms.
- Staffs be prepared to use strategies and techniques which will equip them to effectively utilize multicultural curricula.

Parent Involvement

- Educating and addressing the need for parents to adjust and understand the benefits of an integrated education.
- Strengthening and continuing of parent involvement in short/long term desegregation/integration program planning and implementation in a variety of ways.
- Techniques designed to assist parents to be part of harmonious relationships among other parents, students, and teachers through mutual understanding and respect.

Communications

- Regular and understandable communications concerning existing and newly established desegregation/integration programs to the community by providing several vehicles for ongoing dissemination of information.
- Descriptive brochures providing information about new programs/schools, including enrollment procedures sent home with the appropriate age and grade student four times a year.
- Community Education/Relations Center, the speakers bureau, television, radio, and press will provide wide dis-

semination of accurate and ongoing information to the community at large.

Conclusion

Key factors for successful desegregation/integration programming depends upon the cooperation between Community Education and Desegregation. The following is also helpful:

1. Through positive, forceful leadership and careful planning by a broad cross section of the community, school desegregation can be implemented smoothly.
2. Affirmative leadership by school board members and superintendents is a critical factor for acceptance and peaceful implementation of desegregation.
3. Where public officials actively support the desegregation process, the community generally directs its attention toward making the process work.
4. The process of school desegregation is significantly affected by the support or opposition it receives from the local community leadership.
5. Media coverage of school desegregation has an enormous impact upon local and national opinions and perceptions.
6. Strong united, positive leadership from those in positions of power, authority, and prominence.
7. Commitment and responsibility involved in explaining the laws, careful planning, and plans which reflect civic community educational priorities.

The time for talking about the problem is over; people of consciousness know what has to be done. We need, as Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, an educational system built

"that fosters the social goals of living together, and working together, for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being, rather than prestige buildings, cars, or other such things, whether privately owned or publicaly owned. Our education must, therefore, incalculate a sense of commitment to the total (Afrikan) community, and help the pupils to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past."[3]

FOOTNOTES

1 Beckus, Leonard C., School Desegregation and Cultural Pluralism: Perspectives on Progress, Project STRIDE (Service, Training, and Research in Desegregation Education), San Francisco, 1975

2 National Panel on High School and Adolescent Education, The Education of Adolescents (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1976), p.8

3 Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Education for Self-Reliance, Government of Tanzania Press, Dar es Salaam, 1967, p. 36

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